Marathi Theatre Criticism : Age 150 Years

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Today the 150-year-old Marathi theatre is the oldest theatre in India. There are disputes regarding its birth-date: if the Tanjavur tradition is taken into account one has to go back to 1710. But usually 5 November 1943, the day when Vishnudas Anant Bhave first gave a public performance of *Seeta Swayamvar*, is supposed to be the day when Marathi theatre was born. Bhave not only executed the roles and duties of producer, playwright and director but also popularized the use of the word *natak* (play).

Early Criticism: Bhave Era

Bhave first toured Bombay in 1853. Reports of his plays, some comments and advertisements, is all the data that is available today. On 16 February 1853 *The Bombay Times* carried a review of Bhave's plays and it tells us that they had great experimental value and that a lot of trick-scenes were shown on stage. The review also tells us that several European journalists liked the performance. While writing about the first performance in Bombay the critic says:

> Till a quarter to ten the actors who were very skillful played . . . Almost all the actors and particularly boys, played beautifully, and a big man who called himself 'Mahadev' did not lose a moment without exciting a hearty laugh.

The paper also recommended the play by saying:

> The success of a play depends to a great extent on boys-actors, clowns/jesters and other actors . . . This mythological play resembles the old/ancient Christian tradition and Europeans should certainly watch these performances. [8 March 1853]

Several issues carried detailed information about the plays so as to arouse curiosity amongst the spectators. The duel in which Indrajit's hands are cut off by Laxman's arrow and 'fly' towards Sulochana and the severed smiling head of Indrajit are specially mentioned (*Bombay Times*, Editorial, 11 March 1853)! One can conclude that trick-scenes were a special feature of Bhave's plays.

The editorial says:

> In other respects the performance was really admirable and gave us a much higher idea than we previously possessed of the capabilities of Hindu actors.

Appaji Vishnu Kulkarni has given considerable information about Bhave's plays while writing the history of Marathi theatre in his book *Marathi Rangbhoomi* (1903).

The early critics to discuss Bhave's plays are Appaji Vishnu Kulkarni, Krishnaji Abaji Guruji and Raosaheb Vasudev Ganesh Bhave. All of them tend to give detailed information. Since the scripts of Bhave's plays were not available, these criticisms were performance-oriented.

From 1851 started the era of translations of Sanskrit plays. *Prabodhchandroday* (1851) is the first translation from Sanskrit into Marathi. In 1859 Shriramshastri Palande translated *Prasannaraghava.* Parshuramtatya Godbole's *Venisamhar* (1857), *Uttarramcharit* (1859), *Shakuntal* (1861), *Mricchakatikam* (1862), *Parvatiparinay* (1872), Krishnashastri Rajwade's *Malatimadhav* (1861), *Mudrarakhshas* (1867), *Shakuntal* (1869), *Vikramorvashiya* (1874), Ganeshshastri Lele's *Janakiparinay* (1805), *Malavikagnimitram* (1867), *Vidvashalabhanjika* (1869)—all these translations were basically considered to be 'literature'. The translators do not even talk about performances in their prefaces. The magazine *Dnyanaprasarak* too while discussing *Vikramorvashiya* only talks about the 'translation'. Translations from English were much slower and lesser in number.

Vinayak Janardan Kritane's *Jaypal* was the first Marathi play written with a foreign background. From 1865 to 1880, 24 translations from English and Sanskrit and 38 other plays were published. Till 1879 only seven plays were translated from English, and all of them were translations of Shakespeare.

Criticism of Translations/Adaptations

Within a few days of the publication of the first Marathi adaptation *Jaypal*, in 1865, its criticism appeared in *Dnyanprakash*, written by the scholar Vishnushastri Chiplunkar. One can have an idea of the criteria used by criticism in those days through this piece. In the beginning a detailed description of the plot has been given and criticism has been made because it is based on an episode from the Bible. The critic agrees that the spectator should receive both knowledge and entertainment, but adds that "our people immediately identify and have an empathy for depiction of our ancients, but this is not possible if the characters are alien". The critic apart from thinking as an 'Indian' also analyzes the play as a 'play'. Delightful language and craftsmanly characterization are the features which the critic highlights as reasons for the play's success. The objection to the 'alien' plot reflects a peculiar nationalism. Detailed discussions on the nature of translations and adaptations which were made in the future have its roots in this piece of criticism.

Kritane's *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe* started the discussion of the nature of tragedy. This play has a fusion of Indian and Western theatre traditions. In the beginning we see the Sutradhar and Vidushak whereas the end is tragic. Krishnashastri Chiplunkar has commented on this play in the May 1865 issue of *Shalapatrak.* He has praised Kirtane for writing tragedy which is absent in the Indian tradition. While discussing the play as a tragedy he talks about the "overall tragic effect" and not only the "sorrowful end". "One finds both happiness and sorrow in human life and many saintly people die a painful death and hence it is apt that the playwright tries to reflect this in his plays. A play is a book which by creating dialogues imitates the flow of nature and shows it naturally"—this is his definition of a play (or drama).

On the criteria of the plot, dialogues and language, Chiplunkar decides that this is an 'independent' play. Kru. Aa. Guruji too in his *Natkachi Sthityantare* (Changing Trends in Drama) has offered an interesting comment. He says:

> Since Madhavrao I was a towering figure of swarajya and since the structure of this play was different from the typical mythological plays and since this was the first experiment of its kind, audiences used to rush to watch the performance. Morever, during those days the level of literacy was not very high and ignorance was rampant. Many things in the play were 'suitable' to this ignorance: the sentimental depiction of the dying speech of Madhavrao, Ramabai's decision to enter the *Sati*-pyre, the objections of the counsellors, Narayanrao's very young age, and the *sati*-ceremony.

Laxmanshastri Lele too has noted several characteristics of this play and has highlighted independent structure, choice of subject-matter, design of selected scenes, characterization, delightfulness of language and novelty of the tragic note as the salient features. On the whole the criticism of those times carries reactions to new things that came into Marathi theatre via translations: careful analysis of plot, subject, situations, characterization, language and the end, etc. occupy an important place.

Ravbhahadur Kashinath Balkrishna Marathe's Essay on the Novel and Drama published in 1872, is the first attempt in Marathi dramatic criticism to discuss several aspects of drama in detail. Marathe had popular plays like *Manorama* and *Swairkesha* before him. Now 'social atmosphere' is added to the list of characteristics previously mentioned. When Marathe says that "whatever the subject, it should be communicated through the actions of the characters", it seems that he is trying to probe into the very nature of drama as distinct from other narrative forms. The essential qualities for a playwright that he enlists are: poetic genius, historical insight of the historian, art of the 'foreign' painter, attention-grabbing skill of the orator, cleverness of the novelist, and the sharp sense of the philosopher!

Criticism on Marathi Farce

After the mythological plays of Bhave came the farce. These farces were short pieces and were played along with full-length plays. They can even be called humorous one-acters. The first Marathi farce was presented by the Amarchand Wadikar Mandali in 1856. Reviews appeared in newspapers and magazines, and the playwright also wrote a preface for the published version. Many critics have called the farce *gramya* (uncivilized) and *halkat* (ribald)! Bhaskar Jayram Ajgaonkar in his preface to *Lafangi Sardar* or *Govekarnicha Farce* (1887) says: "Due to such simple books even vagabonds and illiterates take to reading. Once they develop the reading habit they will be benefited by other better books". In the prefaces of *Varanbhatache Prahasan* (1910) by Dattatray Vasudev Joglekar and *Samajrahasya Prahasan* (1908) by Ganpat Krishnaji Gogte, the writers have defended farces.

In a way there is a note of self-criticism with a shade of rationalization in many of the prefaces to plays during this period, and one may say that here playwrights have themselves turned into critics. At least today when one looks back one tends to take into account these prefaces while commenting on the entire corpus of criticism. Some farce-

writers have tried to define 'farce'. According to Shankar Ganpat Chinchankar farce is an "especially humorous scene in which cheating, tom-fooling and ditching are used" (Preface, *Dravyaprasad Prahasan,* 1892).

However nobody seems to have discussed the farce as a special literary or dramatic genre in detail. The term farce is applied to one-acts as well as full-length plays. Titles like *Jhansichi Rani, Narayan Peshve Hyancha Vadh* or *Vishnushastri Chiplunkaranche Natyavtaran* show that there were serious farces as well. *Tarunshikshan Natika* by Narayan Bapuji Kanitkar (1906), a social play, was also called a farce. Vidya Prakashan, a publishing house of farces, had to face a court-trial for obscenity!

It was ten years after the Marathi theatre was born that Marathi drama criticism began. One can say that 1853 is its birthdate. Criticism of Marathi plays first appeared in English newspapers. The review of the mythological play presented in Pune by the "Hindu playwright from Sangli" appeared just after five days in *Dnyanprakash.*

Initially the focus of criticism was inevitably on the performance. It changed when plays began to be 'written'. Criticism has taken into account the problems posed by the process of translation and adaptation, immediately after such translations/adaptations appeared. Similarly, when independent plays started being written, criticism has taken note of its nature and characteristics. This age also saw the beginning of the discussion regarding the tragic play. A person like Kashinath Balkrishna Marathe tried in his writings to present a fusion of Sanskrit and Western theories. When farces came on stage, criticism appears to have taken note of this new form as well. Though Marathi criticism was in its childhood in this period, it certainly was aware of what was happening in theatre, which too was in its childhood.

Kirloskarian Era

Balwant Pandurang *alias* Annasaheb Kirloskar is regarded to be the father of modern Marathi drama. This reputation was founded with the premiere of his Marathi version of *Shakuntal* presented on 31 October 1880 at Pune.

Logical, economical, dramatic and well-made playwriting began with Kirloskar. Commenting on his playwriting the historian of the Marathi theatre, Prof. Shri Na. Banahatti, writes:

> Kirloskar picked up various useful aspects from the prevalent theatres and created his musical drama. He threw away the unartistic, incredible, *rasa*less part of the mythological and 'bookish' plays and took the *rasa*ful, artistic, unityful part and wove it into his dramatic structure. [*Marathi Natyakala ani Natyawangmaya, p. 91*]

Kirloskar's *Shakuntal, Saubhadra,* etc. totally changed the nature of the Marathi play. The period from 1880 to 1900 witnessed great developments in Marathi theatre and contemporary criticism was well aware of this fact. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar has thanked Kirloskar for writing plays like *Shakuntal* and *Saubhadra.* While writing about *Shakuntal* in *Kesari* he has considered it as an opera, and has expressed satisfaction about this new 'fad'. He identifies their characteristics as: musical modes, choice of singers, tunes, and selection of actors. He says about acting: "The third quality essential is appropriate acting.

It is a difficult job to enact all roles ably, but in the present performance there is no actor who can be blamed and some can even be praised!"

The newspaper *Induprakash* said:

With this play the art of theatre is approaching perfection and due to plays of this sort people will find the plays of our *takpitya alalkars* [i.e., the performers of the old mythological] uninteresting and there are chances that they will realize the real worth of the art of theatre.

It seems that everybody had liked Kirloskar's experiments and critics had praised him without any holds barred. *Dnyanprakash* said:

In the same way Kanwa sustained his character very creditably when Shakuntala was taking leave of her father [i.e., Kanwa]. All the spectators were rapt attention itself during the time that the touching scene was being enacted and there were not a few who were actually moved to tears. We conclude this brief notice of the two performances with the expression of our heartiest thanks to Mr Anna Kirloskar for his having entertained the Poona public in the manner set forth above. We have no doubt that if the native stage be under the able guidance of gentleman like Mr Kirloskar, it will be improved in time and the taste of the theatre-frequenting public reformed.

Most of the critics while discussing the Kirloskarian play have emphasized the music aspect. However, the analysis of intrinsic drama as such does not seem to have been done. Only Chiplunkar seems to have paid attention to an important aspect of the performance, namely, acting. When he says "apt acting" he seems to have some gauge or yardstick, if only compared to the loud acting of the Bhave mythological.

Govind Ballal Deval can be said to be a playwright in the Kirloskar tradition. He was the acting-tutor of actors from Kirloskar's troupe. He had also composed a few songs for Kirloskar's plays. His first play *Durga* is mentioned by him to be "based on an English play". His *Sharada* created the mould of the Marathi social play. But in the history of criticism the importance of these two plays is that perhaps for the first time the terms 'development of plot' and 'character' were used in criticism. *Durga* was submitted for a competition held by Rajaram College, Kolhapur, and even got a cash prize of Rs 75. One of the judges, Judge Pathak, said: "The dramatic effect is well-sustained throughout the play and the development of plot and characters is effected with considerable skill". Whereas the critic of *Vividhdnyanvistar* (March-April 1887) asked that since there is discrepancy in the "development of characters" in *Sharada*, which is one of the most important aspects of drama, why should it be called a play at all?

During 1880 to 1900 Marathi drama criticism entered its second phase. In the beginning of this phase translations from English and Sanskrit had begun. After Kirloskar the nature of the Marathi play changed. Criticism has taken note of all these changing trends. The criticism of this period appeared in various newspapers and magazines like *Kesari, Dnyanprakash, Sudharak, Vividhdnyanvistar, Nibandhachandrika, Keral Kokil*, etc. *Keral Kokil* was published outside Maharashtra, but has taken keen notice of Marathi plays. Though this criticism was somewhat topical it has added to the theoretical growth of Marathi drama criticism. Fixed, established criteria are absent, criticism appears to

focus only on one of the aspects of drama, yet the reactions have been well documented.

The sheer introductory nature of criticism began to change and critics started to carefully analyze aspects like plot, characterization, use of music, etc. and evaluate them. First the art and then its grammar. This rule is embodied even in the growth of Marathi drama criticism. First we had translations and then we had criticism asking questions like why and how. The Kirloskarian play gave rise to the discussion about the musical. Marathi drama criticism has immediately reacted to the changing theatrical stimuli during this period.

1900 to 1920

During this period Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar was considered a big name both as a playwright and a critic. His first critical writing is on *Vikram-Shashikala* (1893). His last is perhaps the one on *Sangeet Premabhas* (1917). His style of criticism was imitated by many. Kolhatkar has written *Kalechya Drushtine* (According to the Viewpoint of Art), which is a lengthy criticism of about 600 pages on Narsimha Chintamani Kelkar's *Totayache Banda* (1914). This writing was serialized in *Masik Manoranjan* (Year 19,1914).

Detailed description and thorough analysis of the plot, minute discussion of literature, society and social reforms relating to the subject, continuous reference to both the literary and social background and logical approach are the characteristics of Kolhatkar's criticism.

Kolhatkar says: "Any craftsman deliberately or unconsciously follows certain rules while creating his work". It is obvious that he believes in certain objective universal rules that exist even before the work of art. It is interesting to note that Kolhatkar has in most places used the word 'craftsman' instead of 'artist'. "The *science of art* can only be perfected by experience", says Kolhatkar. This critical piece consists of two parts. In the first part he discusses the elementary principles of art and in the second part he analyzes *Totayache Banda* according to them. These principles were accepted and followed by many.

Kolhatkar entered the art sphere as a critic. Patankar, the author of *Vikram-Shashikala*, was angered on reading its criticism by Kolhatkar and challenged him to write a play. This habit of playwrights continues till date. The notion that one who cannot write a play becomes a critic is at least this old!

Kolhatkar as a playwright operated from 1895 to 1905. Critics have literally slashed his plays and have created a small corpus of criticism of the Kolhatkarian play. In *Veertanayachi Dhaal* Kolhatkar has tried to answer the objections raised by his critics, and has said that contemporary criticism is unjust and cheap, and has also alleged that the people whom he criticized initially are themselves retorting by criticizing his plays, trying to hide behind various editors.

The period of Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar, Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar and Ram Ganesh Gadkari is supposed to be the golden period of Marathi theatre. (This period is

EXCERPTS:
Achyutrao Kolhatkar's Criticism of *Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha* (1914)

. . . The play *Sangeet Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha* is like an actor. When there is no actor who can perform singing-female roles in a drama company, some hoarse-voiced male forcefully drapes a *shalu* and again and again repeats words like, '. . . the scoundrel is pulling my *pallu* . . .' Similarly, *Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha* has forcefully put on the *sindoor* of poetry on its forehead and has taken a musical form.

. . . Poetically, all scenes of Mrinalini are praiseworthy, but why should the Kokil start its song in the midst of the Panipat-war?

. . . Another troublesome part in this play is the 'borrowing' of names of characters. Now, this word is not as demonlike *(rakshasi)* as required, but since in the literary sphere 'theft' is supposed to be a non-respectable word, one has to use the word 'borrowing'.

. . . Another funny part of *Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha* is the uncountable, unnecessary number of characters. There is no check on this number at all and characters keep on entering as and when scenes take place.

. . . Shabby juxtaposing, extreme nonpatience, depiction of unnecessary submissiveness and too strong valour, and inappropriate music—these words make a detailed description of the faults of *Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha.*

Usha Masik,1914

About the Critic

Achyut Balwant Kolthatkar (1879-1931), not to be confused with Shreepad Krishna Kolhatkar (1871-1934), was however a critic and a playwright like him. He is known as 'Sandeshkar', *Sandhesh* being the newspaper published by him since 1915. It was for this paper that he wrote most of his drama reviews. An interesting thing to note is that this critic later also tried his hand at playwrighting, producing plays and even acting!

About the Play

Rakshasi Mahatvakanksha (1914) by the great freedom-fighter Waman Malhar Joshi was a play full of praise of heroic values and had the intention to encourage the love for one's country among the Indian people. However, falling a prey to the popular tradition of those times, it was written as a musical!

from 1880 to about 1918.) Khadilkar's first play *Sawai Madhavrao Yancha Mrutyu* was published in *Vividhdnyanvistar* in about 1895-96. Khadilkar continuously wrote for about forty years, i.e. till 1936. He wrote 15 plays. Considerable criticism is available on *Sawai Madahvrao Yancha Mrutyu, Vidyaharan, Satwapariksha, Swayamvar, Draupadi* and *Menaka. Kanchangadchi Mohna* has been ignored though it had a different structure and a tragic note. *Manapman* and *Bhaubandki* were hits on stage, but available criticism on them is scarce.

Due to his use of mythological tales and historical facts, questions regarding the relationship of mythology, history and drama arose in criticism. Khadilkar made a lot of changes in the original stories and said that he did this for theatrical purposes. But there was great resentment against these changes.

Khadilkar's *Sawai Madhavarao* had two characters based on Hamlet and Iago, whereas *Keechakvadh* was a political allegory. Future critics have specially discussed these plays. In those days *Sawai Madhavarao* was discussed 'as a play' by Govind Ramchandra Oak and he said that it is "successful as an entertaiment"!

From the criticism of Khadilkar's plays certain features of the criticism of those days become clear. The plot should be credible, characterization should be subtle, the subject should be communicated in a simple way, the structure should be like 'sculpture', unity of place, time and action should be maintained or else empathy will not be aroused, and the theatrical experience should be ultimately 'joy-giving'—these are certain ideas that critics of this period have expressed.

Khadilkar's plays created certain questions for criticism to consider and due to these discussions the horizons of criticism widened. For example that tragedy does not depend on the 'sorrowful end' only but on the overall dominant *rasa* was a new idea. Some of the criticism of Khadilkar's plays is purely literary criticism while some of it is performance reviews. However, even in the latter, more than theatrical elements or acting, things like plot, language, problems regarding prose and verse, characterization and such others literary points are covered.

Gadkari and the post-Gadkari Era

Kolhatkar and Khadilkar were both highly educated—they were graduates! Ram Ganesh Gadkari was not. But he almost created a Gadkari era. From 1912 to 1919 he wrote four and a half plays: *Premsanyas, Punyaprabhav, Ekach Pyala, Bhavbandhan* and the incomplete *Rajsanyas.* The very first play *Vedyancha Bazar* was even less than half-complete. There is a vast amount of criticism available on all these plays and fresh criticism is even now being made.

Boundless imagination, great command over language, larger-than-life characters and virtuosity in both comedy and tragedy are Gadkari's salient characteristics. Even now we have imitations of the Gadkari style.

The discussion of the tragic hero and villain began with Gadkari's plays. Should a playwright write roles for a particular actor? This controversy (which is present even today) too began with Gadkari. (Ganpatrao Bodas has claimed that Gadkari wrote

Vrindawan—*Punyaprabhav*—specially for him.) Due to *Premsanyas* and *Ekach Pyala* discussions about tragedy continued on a more minute level. Criticism now started considering Aristotelian poetics, the characteristics of tragedy, the reasons for the absence of tragedy in the Indian tradition, etc. Special books have also been written on humour in Gadkari.

There is a legion of Gadkarian critics, but Vi. Sa. Khandekar, Na. Si. Phadke, Pra. Ke. Atre, Ra. Sham. Walimbe and Tryan. Vi. Sardeshmukh are important among them.

Now, after the Gadkari birth centenary, critics from various modern disciplines are looking back and are doing reappraisals as well as reassessments.

Sardeshmukh has omitted *Rajsanyas* and has considered Gadkari's 'domestic plays' (i.e., *samsaar-natke* as Gadkari himself called them). His main point is that even in his plays it is Gadkari's poetic faculty which is at work (Gadkari wrote poetry under the pseudonym of 'Govindagraj'). He says that Gadkari did not borrow anything from his guru Kolhatkar nor from Kirloskar, Deval or Khadilar. "To the extent Gadkari relied on his own, independent poetic nature, without being disloyal to it, his plays became unique."

Bhargawram Vitthal *alias* Mama Warerkar can be said to be a contemporary of Kolhatkar and Khadilkar. In 1908 Warerkar's *Kunjvihari* was staged. He has 37 full-length, 13 one-act and six short plays to his credit apart from novels, mystery stories, translations of Bengali novels and an autobiography—*Maza Nataki Sansar.*

He experimented throughout his life. His main concern was bringing social problems into focus and using theatre as a medium of social change. One cannot mention another Marathi dramatist who has taken such a clear social stand in the presence of adverse situations and meagre following. (One could perhaps show certain similarities between Warerkar and Tendulkar.) He also had to face venomous and ample criticism.

Those writing 'for' Warerkar's plays from 1908 to 1943 are mostly his friends! Till about 1934 he was not even thought to be a major playwright. In 1934 Wa. La. Kulkarni wrote in *Parijatak Masik:* "Nobody but Warerkar has tried to adopt famous novels for the stage: such an attempt is needed indeed".

Warerkar throughout tried to bring modernity in content, form and theatre technique. He presented social problems in dramatic form and brought in a kind of simplicity and straightforwardness in theatre. He used unadorned language, dismissed soliloquies, slashed the music, tried to make sets and costumes authentic, lessened the duration of the play and brought it down to three acts. He was also the first 'feminist' playwright! Critics have certainly praised him for all this, the initial lukewarm response has faded, but yet the desired analysis of his plays has not been done, and excepting Prof. Pangoo and Vi. Sa. Khandekar critics of the first order have not touched them.

Acharya alias Pra. Ke. Atre is another epoch-making playwright. He wrote both tragedies and comedies, but excelled in the latter. He brought the forms of satire (*Sashtang Namaskar*) and burlesque (*Bhramacha Bhopla*) on the Marathi stage. Caricaturish characterization was his speciality. He also handled serious issues in a lighter vein, e.g. *Lagnachi Bedi.* 1933 to 1939 was Atre's peak period, but his plays are popular even today. The magazines

Dnyanprakash and *Nirbhid* continuously created an atmosphere around Atre's plays. These plays started discussions about theatre techniques as well.

Mo. Ga. Rangnekar is the next important playwright after Atre. His forte was the well-made play which portrayed problems of the middle class. His plays should be given the credit of trying to arrest the attraction of cinema. He discontinued the practice of having *raagdari*-based songs and introduced short songs with simple tunes. He proved that a play is not to be read, but seen. However criticism has not taken notice of his plays and even today he remains an ignored playwright.

In this period itself we see that criticism has slowly decreased to be prompt in giving detailed reactions to new trends. Playwrights of the stature of Deval and Warerkar did not receive the kind of attention they deserved. The criticism which discussed the intricacies of the plot and the subtleties of language did not thoroughly approach the problems of the social dimension of theatre.

This was the period when the box-set was introduced on the Marathi stage in *Satteche Gulam*. Though this modern device was welcomed, nobody has mentioned or foreseen that with this finally the naturalistic play has arrived—never to depart—and that for years to come, at least in the mainstream, this would be the only genre acceptable. Nobody has discussed this as an 'alien concept', nobody has searched for the 'Indianness of theatre'. In fact, in the years to come the mythological tried to be more and more 'naturalistic' rather than being more and more 'mythical'!

Of course, theatre is a melting pot, and nationalistic, nativistic fervour does not define or create theatre. There is hardly any point in discarding the naturalistic play totally today. It is there, and is now also a part of our tradition. (Or else the arch and the automobile too can never be called ours.) The point however is that when this transition was taking place criticism did not notice its implications!

A characteristic of criticism during this period is its length and eye for detail which at times is excessive. The performance aspect is not stressed at all and aspects like stage-decor and lighting get scarce mention. Basically this was literary criticism—even the property of the spoken word in drama is not emphasized. Since criticism depends on the actual kind of theatre practised, genre discussion does not have a place. Credibility of plot, impressiveness (not naturalness) of language, development of characterization are the main criteria along with (at times) the social or moral value and *rasanukulta* (i.e., having *rasa*—the criterion of the *Natyashastra* which even today is an essentially contested concept). The distinction between textual criticism and performance criticism was not very clear; in fact, most of the times it was not made at all. Therefore, the reins of criticism went into the hands of literature students and not theatre people. This kind of literary criticism of plays continues till date and leaving aside exceptions even today most of the newspaper reviews only describe the plot! (And unfortunately the detailed analysis of the plot made during these olden times is absent.)

Contemporary Drama Criticism

Up till now we tried to trace the history of Marathi drama criticism by looking at its

reactions to actual plays performed, because otherwise only general and vague comments would have been made. Perhaps one could follow the same procedure and come to date and one would get a rough history of these parallel forces, i.e. theatre and criticism. But it would be too lengthy a process. Therefore, in this section I will try to comment on contemporary drama criticism, i.e., of the last 25 years, without reference to actual plays performed.

The first person to come up with the idea of a specialized magazine devoted to theatre was Anant Waman Barve. The first issue of *Natyakala* edited by him was first published in October 1904. This unfortunately continued only for two years.

Since the publication of Appaji Vishnu Kulkarni's *Marathi Rangabhoomi* in 1903 discussions about theatre and theatre people started on a large scale in newspapers and magazines. Due to this the need of a specialized theatre magazine was again felt. And Kirloskar Natak Mandali—one of the earliest and reputed drama troupes—started the publication of *Rangabhoomi* in 1907. This publication (of a drama troupe) pioneered overall and mature drama criticism in Marathi. The magazine dealt with subjects like the actor, playwright, plays, the theatre profession, stage, spectators, critics, theatre education, Sanskrit plays and the *Natyashastra*, introduction of Western plays and theatre, criticism of Marathi scripts and performances, biographies of actors and playwrights, etc. *Rangabhoomi* has made an unforgettable contribution.

Some other magazines that continually published drama criticism are: *Vividhdnyanvistar, Manoranjan, Ratnakar, Dnyanprakash, Shalapatrak, Nibandhmala, Induprakash, Kesari, Native Opinion, Saddharmdeep, Nibandhchandrika, Mumukshu, Balbodh,* etc.

Magazines devoted to theatre criticism in recent times are: *Natak* (ed. Baburaro Andhrutkar) under the guidance of Dr A. Na. Bhalerao, *Natyadarpan* (ed. Sudheer Damle), *Nandi* (ed. Devidas Telang) and *Bharatshastra* (ed. Vinayak Padwal) which was again published by an experimental drama group called Sankalp. The series 'Why is Marathi Theatre Dwarfish?' by Madhav Manohar (now available in book form) appeared in *Natak.*

The Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Natya Parishad used to publish a magazine called *Natyabhoomi.* It was edited for some time by Acharya Atre and Mo. Ga. Rangnekar. Afterwards Sudheer Damle took it over and from 1975 to 1988 brought it out every month under the name of *Natyadarpan.* Now it is published twice a year. However, it only stressed certain happennings in theatre and entertaining reportage and could not do anything impressive in the sphere of criticism.

Bharatshastra published special numbers of 'translations' and on plays like *Tilak ani Agarkar.* It can be said that performance-criticism as we understand it today was started by Madhav Manohar in his column 'Pancham' in Sobat (4 May 1967 to 9 May 1976) and *Bharatshastra* attempted to do the work we now expect from a specialized theatre-magazine.

Apart from specialized theatre magazines other serious literary magazines have been publishing serious theatre criticism. Dhon. Vi. Deshpande has written at length on certain

important plays in *Satyakatha*. His writings are now available in book form (*Mala Disleli Natke*).

Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni used to write on extremely intelligent critical column in the weekly *Mouj* (1949). *Sobat* and *Manoos* are other two weeklies which consistently offered serious drama criticism. Madhav Manohar, Pushpa Bhave and Vijay Tendulkar wrote objective, analytical criticism in these weeklies, and this began serious criticism which paid attention to the performance aspect as well and also reflected a modern sensibility. It would really need a separate article to appreciate and evaluate criticism which began with these critics.

Manohar's criticism incorporated thoughts an the history of theatre, comparison with international theatre, etc. But even while trying to write two separate pieces on the script and the performance, his performance criticism too was basically literature-oriented. Manohar's other characteristic is length, which almost became a fault. Comparatively Bhave's criticism was brief, even tailor-made. Here the socio-political dimension of theatre was always taken into consideration along with the aesthetic. Tendulkar's criticism had a subjective and appreciative note—it was always obvious that here is a creative person who is writing criticism.

The Theatre Development Centre (T.D.C.) of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bombay, published a bulletin called *Facts & News* from 1987 to 1993. There was detailed reporting of the archival documentation being done by the T.D.C. and each issue carried excerpts of interviews of various threatre persons. Almost three-fourths of the issue dealt with Marathi theatre. A yearly Marathi issue called *Rang Antarang* was also published by the Centre, which carried all the information appearing in the English issues. Though criticism as such did not find a place here, mention of the work done by the bulletin should not seem out of place.

All these years regular review columns have been appearing in all daily newspapers. However, barring a few exceptions, these were written by journalists who more often than not had a zero theatre experience. Naturally, these reviews were nearly reports—and those too, not very objective. At times the commercial theatre producers used these columns as their advertisements! In fact, many times these columnists ridiculed the experimental movement and created misunderstandings. Again, the contribution of Manohar and Bhave has to be noted, because it was they who stood beside the parallel movement during this same period.

Newspaper Criticism Today

Apart from the critical function *per se,* criticism appearing in daily newspapers in a way takes the play to the spectators. The spectator's first introduction to a play is *via* the newspaper drama critic. Whatever his or her analysis the drama critic becomes an important agent in nurturing public taste.

Presently a very welcome trend is noticed. Many of the drama critics working for daily newspapers nowadays are people who are actually connected with the stage. A few years ago a drama-critics' meet was organized in Pune. Vijaya Mehta had then talked about

'dramaturgs' who work in theatre as assistants before taking up the job of a drama critic. A similar situation is now seen in Marathi, e.g. Prashant Dalvi (*Loksatta*), Jayant Pawar (*Sanj Loksatta*) and Rajeev Naik are practising playwrights. Madhav Vaze (*Sakal* weekly), Kamlakar Nadkarni (*Maharashtra Times*) are translators or directors or actors. Vijay Tapas has been closely connected with experimental groups. All these people have first-hand information about theatre and have worked in various departments in theatre. This knowledge and experience has been extremely beneficial to drama criticism and has resulted in more attention being paid to the performance aspect. Thanks to these critics drama criticism is no longer at the mercy of literature students and professors. The relationship of acting style, lights, costumes to the content and language-form is now being analyzed. The constraint of space, however, is always present, and detailed analysis, therefore, is left out.

Though the number of such critics is not large compared to the number of newspapers, the fact that today we have critics who can even otherwise be called theatre people is definitely a welcome sign. This has slowly brought about a change in the texture of drama criticism!

However even in these columns the ratio of text-criticism to performance criticism is not always balanced—an obvious reason being that for the latter the critic has to rely on memory alone. Moreover the target audience is the layman who is often not interested in analysis, but in sheer commendation. He wants a reaction, but not the reasons behind it. Therefore, the critic can only very briefly touch upon the intricacies in decor, etc.

But the other aspects of a dramatic performance do not only enhance the script—they many a times have an interpretative role to perform and go a long way in shaping the final experience. Though newspaper critics of dailies do mention all the departments, they rarely comment on the specific contribution made by each aspect. This, even today, is a major limitation.

Though this article has no prescriptive function, it would not be out of place to offer a small suggestion. The number of really important plays staged every year is not large. It would be a good idea to provide ample space even in newspapers—say four times a year—for detailed analysis of all aspects of the performance of these important plays. Whatever the ultimate goal of criticism, moulding public taste has also been its function, and such analyses made available to the lay reader (i.e. , not only to specialized theatre magazines) will definitely prove to be helpful.

The terminology of theatre is slowly developing. There is a tendency to use Sanskrit terms directly, e.g. *rasapurna.* However, English terms have to be translated, as, whether one likes it or not, the Western tradition has always been a model. Formerly, as most of the critics were literary scholars, they used a lot of terms from literacy criticism and terms specific to theatre were not developed. This literary jargon was many a times pedantic and even clumsy, e.g. *eksamayavacchedekarun* for 'simultaneously'. And for the layman it was definitely obscure. Even today this blemish is present in criticism done by 'professors'. Newspapers critics mainly writing for the common man had to make use of simple terms, and some fine words came into practice, e.g. *dakhvegiri* (showmanship),

bhadakbatbatit (gaudy and crude), *swaroopnirnay* (interpretation), *paddeep* (footlights), *prakashzot* (spotlight), *akrutibandh* (composition), *drushya-parinam* (visual impact); etc. However, even today one has to use words like *ramyadbhutvad* for romanticism and a verbatim translation like *a-parinam* for a-effect. However, one can surely hope that in the near future Marathi drama criticism will throw away the crutches of English and Sanskrit terminology.

Today new plays get reviews in all newspapers and weeklies and, as we have seen, most of the aspects of a live performance are covered. However, criticism has to do much more than reviewing plays.

Till about 1930 or 1940 we find that playwright-centred criticism or issue-oriented (e.g. translations) criticism was common,. Today such criticism is almost absent. One also feels that the critics of those days were not only thorough but also more open.

Criticism is available on the work of Natyamanvantar, the group which gave us the landmark production of *Andhlyanchi Shala* (1933). But there is no elaborate, analytical criticism available on the epoch-making *Rangayan* of the 1960s!

Analysis of the entire corpus of work by directors like Damoo Kenkre, Vijaya Mehta, Satyadev Dube (i.e., his Marathi plays) is also absent, leave aside studies of work by Da. Ga. Godse (decor) or Bhaskar Chandavarkar (music).

The early criticism did ignore the performance aspect but at least concentrated on the spirit and attempted playwright-oriented criticism. From Mo. Ga. Rangnekar, Mama Warerkar, Vijay Tendulkar to Mahesh Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar, Rajeev Naik, Shafaat Khan and Prashant Dalvi, several playwrights have experimented with theatre language, stage technique, form and structure, etc. But in-depth, detailed analytical criticism of their work is absent.

Vi. Va. Shirwadkar, the late Chin. Tryam. Khanolkar, Vasant Kanetkar, Bal Kolhatkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Ratnakar Matkari and Jaywant Dalvi are major playwrights of the earlier generation. But sufficient attention has not been paid to them especially as compared to writers like Kirloskar. Deval, Khadilkar and Gadkari from earlier generations.

Dhon. Vi. Deshpande has written on playwrights like Mahesh Elkunchwar, Ratnakar Matkari, Vi. Va. Shirwadkar, Go. Pu. Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar, but has only covered the text.

Some plays like *Barrister* (Jaywant Dalvi, dir. Vijaya Mehta) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (Vijay Tendulkar, dir. Jabbar Patel) demand thorough performance criticism as well—which has not yet been made. However, a collection of articles on *Ghashiram Kotwal* (ed. Shyamla Vanarase) is in the offing and Rajeev Naik's detailed semiotic analysis of the performance of *Ghashiram Kotwal* too is about to be published.

Several playwrights, actors and technicians have written their autobiographies. e.g. Govindrao Tembe, Ganpatrao Bodas, Chitamanrao Kolhatkar, Keshavrao Date, Nanasaheb Chafekar, Keshavrao Bhole, Mama Warerkar, Baburao Pendharkar, Nanasaheb Phatak, Bapurao Mane, Durgabai Khote, Mama Pendse, Madhukar Toradmal, Shanta Jog, etc. However, on the whole, barring a few exceptions, there is very less material here which can be included in the larger corpus of drama criticism, as it is basically anecdotal.

Even today we have playwrights who have done some important critical writing as well. After Vasant Shantaram Desai and K. Narayan Kale, Vasant Kanetkar has discussed the nature of theatre in his book *Natak: Ek Chintan* (1974). Vi. Va. Shirwadkar has translated *Othello* and *Macbeth* and has also written about Shakespeare in his book *Shodh Shakespearecha* (1983).

One of the most important books in the corpus of Marathi drama criticism is *Natyavimarsh* by K. Narayan Kale. Kale himself was a talented director and tutor. In this book he has not written about any particular play, playwright or director, but has dealt with broader topics like group playreadings, children's theatre, the concept of playwriting, audience psychology, etc.

Marathi theatre is one of the oldest theatres in India. Marathi drama criticism is almost as old. It is difficult to squeeze in its entire history in one article. However, I have tried according to my capacity to take note of the important trends, events, schools and contributions of Marathi drama criticism in its various phases. I am fully aware that more than what has been said has been left unsaid. The humble aim of this article is to acquaint the non-Marathi reader with the major transitions in the history of Marathi drama criticism.

Theatre is still very much alive in Maharashtra notwithstanding the onslaughts of the cinema, television and video. The number of performances is the highest in comparison with other States.

Drama criticism too has played its small role in achieving this situation. In the beginning Marathi drama criticism was in the hands of scholars and litterateurs, and now criticism has found actual theatre persons as well.

One feels that the drama critic is in a way like the backstage artist. His work is not easily recognized. This article, which in comparison with the span of the subject is brief, is only a humble attempt to raise the curtain. □

Notes

1. The dates refer to the publication of the first editions and the first issues of magazines.
2. The initials are written in the Marathi style (consonant plus vowel) as the concerned persons are known by their initials as used in Marathi (Hence, Pu. Shi. Rege and not P.S. Rege).
3. The subtitles are given for convenience and do not indicate definite and different periods of drama criticism.

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Note: The bibliography is in chronological order of publication.